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AUTHOR Lucco, Robert J.; Meekins, Philip E.
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ABSTRACT

In order to seek clarification of instructional goal priorities, the Virginia Beach, Virginia, school division designed a comprehensive model for the assessment of instructional needs, described in this paper. The principal objectives of the needs assessment include (1) providing a mechanism for the systematic involvement of community residents (both parents and nonparents) in establishing educational priorities; (2) identifying instructional goal priorities commensurate with community concerns; and (3) assisting in the modification of existing instructional programs via participant feedback. The assessment model has five phases, which are planning, design, implementation, evaluation, and modification. (Author/DS)

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Community Involvement In Instructional Programing: Fact or Fiction

ROBERT J. LUCCO
and
PHILIP E. MEEKINS
Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Dr. Robert J. Lucco
Post Office Box 6038
Annex IV
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

The Virginia Beach City Public Schools has designed a comprehensive instructional needs-assessment model, which will serve as a basis for the re-examination of philosophy and policies, with respect to the evaluation and modification of current instructional programs.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

A pervasive problem facing American public education as it embarks upon the last quarter of the twentieth century is the task of re-establishing public confidence and support, particularly that of its client population. Amid charges of inequality, irrelevance, and mismanagement leveled at our nation's educational institutions, some educators have insisted upon the restructuring of policy-making procedures (Hamilton, 1968; Bloomberg, 1968; McCoy, 1970; Sizemore, 1971). Common among most educational reformers is the notion that citizen participation is tantamount to success in the arena of "public education."

Accountability is an issue which all public institutions must face according to the democratic principles which govern their existence. However, during the past decade, Illich (1970), Freire (1970), Dennison (1969), Kohn (1969), and others have popularized this term with respect to public education. In the process several questions concerning the basic value underlying our educational institutions have been generated. These concerns supersede the issue of whether trigonometry should be taught in the sophomore or junior year, and cut right at the heart of our notion of participatory democracy. Against this backdrop national sentiment now demands that local school divisions re-evaluate their position with regard to the distribution of decision-making authority, in an effort to further democratize policy-making procedures and identify quality educational programs.

The state education agency has, in most cases, responded to this cry for greater grass roots participation. In Virginia, the State Department of Education has instituted state Standards of Quality and Objectives for Public Schools. Among the stated objectives for Virginia's public schools is the systematic involvement of community residents in the planning and implementation of local educational programs. Implicit within this objective is the notion that accountability originates in response to community concerns.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In an effort to seek some clarification concerning instructional goal priorities, and in compliance with state directives, the City of Virginia Beach School Division designed a comprehensive assessment of instructional needs. The following were among the principle objectives of the model: (1) to gain a working knowledge of our educational program as it now exists; (2) to provide a

mechanism for the systematic involvement of community residents in the establishment of educational priorities; (3) to identify instructional goal priorities commensurate with community concerns; (4) to aid in the modification of current instructional programs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

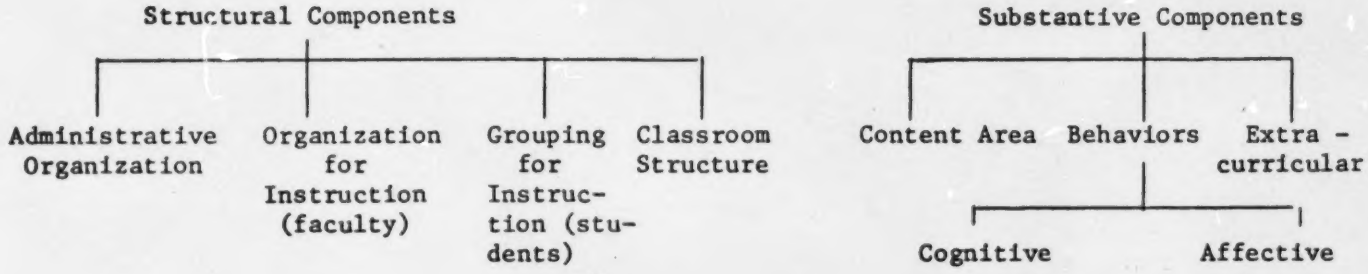
The assessment model was conceived in terms of a series of five programatic phases or stages: (1) Program Planning, (2) Program Design, (3) Program Implementation (data collection), (4) Program Evaluation (data analysis), and (5) Program Modification (policy formation).

Phase I PLANNING

The first phase involved the solicitation of information (i.e., collection of baseline data) concerning current instructional aims and aspirations, and future instructional needs. All aspects of the instructional program were examined including: structural components (e.g., grouping for instruction) and substantive components (e.g., cognitive and affective dimensions of instruction). See Figure I. The objective of this juncture being to arrive at the clearest expression of representative views concerning instructional priorities from each stratum sampled. Upon the examination of data generated in Phase I, an overall research design was developed, and a survey instrument readied.

Figure I

Elements of the Instructional Program



Phase II DESIGN

Primary emphasis in the second phase of the model was placed upon the drawing of a systematic sample based upon target populations identified in Phase I, and the development of a survey instrument to be used in Phase III (data collection). Having stratified the population of Virginia Beach into several groups of interest, (e.g., parent and non-parent) we proceeded in this phase to employ a stratified random sampling procedure to arrive at a survey sample. With regard to instrumentation, the Design phase saw the development of a questionnaire based upon the results of preliminary data collected in Phase I. The instrument asked the respondent to rate 18 instructional goals on a scale from one, Least Important to seven, Most Important. The second section of the instrument had the respondent re-rate the 18 goals in terms of how effective schools have been in realizing these goals. Again a seven point scale, ranging from one, Poor to seven, Excellent, was employed. The third and final section had respondents rate specific subject offering at the elementary, junior and senior high levels by checking one of four options: Strong, Average, Weak, or No Opinion.

Phase III IMPLEMENTATION

Phase three provided for data collection. Data were collected using a variety of approaches and techniques, including mailed questionnaires and personal interviews. Respondents were granted anonymity; however, survey instruments were coded to allow for identification by group.

Phase IV EVALUATION

In the fourth phase data obtained through the survey were analyzed. First, the average mean rating per goal was computed for each group (i.e., students teachers, parents and non-parents). Average mean ratings were then converted to ranks, and data was displayed through tables. In the second stage of analysis, mean ratings were combined across groups for each goal, and a new set of ranks were developed. This information was then combined with a utility function and a performance measure for each goal, to yield a decision model upon which program modification was based.

Phase V MODIFICATION: THE CATCH

The fifth and final phase of the model ostensibly served to facilitate the re-evaluation of current philosophy and policies with respect to instructional programs. Theoretically, at this point instructional goals are brought into line with the felt needs of the community. The catch goes as follows: To what extent does analyzed data serve as a bases for program modification (i.e., to seek programatic solutions for program deficits) or to what extent has data been diffused prior to Phase V (i.e., to seek political solutions for program deficits)?

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